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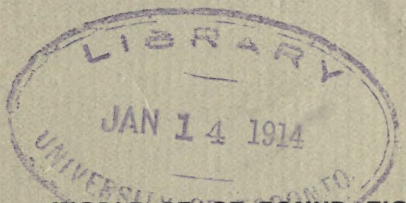
World Peace Foundation

NAVAL WASTE

BY

DAVID STARR JORDAN

"There is no state of readiness for war. The notion calls for never-ending sacrifices. Make up your mind soberly what you want—peace or war—then get ready. What we prepare for is what we get."—W. G. SUMNER



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NAVAL WASTE

DAVID STARR JORDAN

A petition, bearing date of January 14, 1913, has been sent out by the Navy League of the United States, asking for "legislation of the utmost importance regarding the personnel of the Navy, and for a council of National Defense to decide on a continuing and consistent program of naval construction." It is further stated that "to fix the country's standard, the proposed Council of National Defense should take into consideration the naval programs and military strength of possible opponents."

To this, as thus worded, there need be no serious objection, especially if a few modifying phrases are added. It certainly seems reasonable that a man qualified to be an admiral should reach that rank while still in the prime of life. Also there is no evident reason why a man unfitted to command a fleet should ever become admiral.

It seems indeed desirable to have a council of National Defense, but it should go much farther than is suggested by the Navy League. For example, it should show why, how, and in what degree "national defense" by force of arms is necessary or justifiable. It should not merely consider "the naval programs and military strength of possible opponents" — a very simple matter of statistics, when we agree who the "opponents" are. It should enter into the consideration of international relations, of the real or assigned causes of military extension in other nations, and of the financial resources from which each nation must draw its military exactions. For

it is apparent that "the military strength" of a nation is not wholly nor even mainly gauged by the extent of its army or navy. In the end all such matters are determined by the sums of money which may be borrowed for military purposes or which may be exacted through taxation.

The principal function of such a council should therefore be judicial, and its subject matter would lie mainly in the domain of international economics and finance. Military and naval strategy would necessarily be a secondary consideration, and the direction of these should, of course, lie in the hands of trained specialists. But the Council itself should be composed primarily of statesmen representing the essential interests of the nation, the most important of which is the maintenance of international peace.

Our council should therefore consider all possible sources of friction with other nations and the means of honorably removing them without recourse to violence or to the suggestion of violence. The strengthening bonds of internationalism, the influence of common interests, and the rapidly growing opposition of commerce and of banking to war and warlike demonstrations should be estimated. These considerations belong to the domain of statesmanship and but little to that of militarism. In any case, a wide survey of actual conditions should be the foundation of national policy. The mere consideration of "the military and naval strength of possible opponents" is but a very small side issue in the general problem. No decision of a "Council of National Defense" could be acceptable to our people unless based on the broad consideration indicated above.

Attached to this petition we find "Sixty-seven Rea-

sons for a Strong Navy." To these we turn with interest, and with dissappointment. What "a strong navy" is, is nowhere suggested. Apparently we have never had one. Or perhaps strength is only relative, consisting in maintaining the second or third place among nations. But the vital question of to-day is, why our navy need keep its present size and cost. Why need it be made larger? I do not find in the "sixty-seven reasons" a single one which seems to bear on either of these points.

To the ordinary taxpayer, the United States Navy seems very large already. Its columns of statistics indicate an amazing growth. Its cost, in expense, in round numbers, was in 1881, $13,000,000 per year; in 1891, $22,000,000; in 1901, $56,000,000; in 1911, $121,000,000; in 1912, $130,000,000. The Navy League does not state how much more is to-day necessary for "a strong navy," but from other sources we learn that $146,000,000 would be, for the time, an acceptable compromise figure.

The British fleet, intended hitherto to double that of any possible opponent, cost in 1881, $51,000,000; in 1891, $69,000,000; in 1901, $138,000,000, and in 1911, $203,000,000. In Germany, under a very realistic threat of destruction of her commerce and under the spur of her all-powerful armament syndicates and military aristocracy, the navy expenses stood at $11,000,000 in 1881; $23,000,000 in 1891; $38,000,000 in 1901; and $115,000,000 in 1911. Thus the navy of the United States is now second in cost, whether in effectiveness or not, to the navy of Great Britain alone. With no superfluous marine stations to care for, the German navy may have greater actual power. In any event, that of the United States is one of the most costly institutions ever pro-

jected. Its yearly expenses exceed the endowment revenues of all the Universities of the world,—the foundations of intellectual advancement. They exceed the cost of maintenance of all industrial and technical schools of all grades, including all colleges of Engineering and Agriculture, — the foundation of the world's industrial advancement.

Now if a "strong navy" demands all this and more than this, there must be strong reasons in its favor, both absolute and relative. To give reasons for having "a navy" does not suffice. We must all admit that a seafaring nation requires a navy. It must do its part in international police, in removing the dangers of the sea, in rendering assistance to citizens in trouble abroad, in so far as this can be done without invading the actual sovereignty of other nations.

Some thirty of the "sixty-seven reasons" would be met by the moderate and efficient navy of 1881, just as well as by the ten times more costly one of 1912. The fact that Great Britain spends still more than we do and that Germany has about overtaken us, is likewise not an argument in itself. It is for us to show some very valid reasons why we should strive to keep in the race with these militant nations whose problems and purposes are very different from ours. Moreover, to argue that a navy is useful does not prove that one twice as costly would be twice as useful.

"The Navy is our main defense." This is true in a military sense only, but waiving that point for a moment, we ask for the completion of the sentence: defense against whom? Of the hundreds who use this phrase, no one has furnished a valid answer. The United States has not an enemy in the world. There is apparently

not a rival nation which could fight us if it would, or would fight us if it could. We are surrounded by peace, which cannot be broken except by ourselves. Apparently there is not a nation which by naval attack could harm us, even without a "strong navy," to a degree in any way comparable to the injury to itself, through the loss of our friendship, the loss of our trade.

It is said that once a Spanish commandant at the Presidio of San Francisco, wishing properly to salute a British ship, sent on board the vessel to borrow the necessary powder. In like fashion it would appear that the large nations in Europe or Asia, overloaded with debt and therefore short of funds, must first borrow money in New York before any of them could make war on the United States.

It is not clear that we should concern ourselves with what other nations are doing in this neck to neck Marathon race, which is entailing such risks on Europe, unless we are brought also into jeopardy. That the naval competition of Europe injures us is plain, not that it involves a war-menace to us, but that it threatens the destruction of credit, and that it has filled the world atmosphere with war talk and war scares, — matters opposed to the well-being of all peoples.

Because every dollar spent in armament strengthens the financial interest in war, because it gives more volume to war scares and war talk, we believe that the war armaments of the world, so far from being a national defense, constitute in each of the armored countries the chief actual danger. We cannot say that increased armament makes for peace, when plainly, the world over, it makes for war. It makes for peace only as it brings about tax-exhaustion, and as the money-lenders

of the world are no longer willing to consent to the dangers of conflict between any two of the great nations.

The strained relations in Europe between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente (due primarily no doubt to jealousy of rival exploiters) are being enormously accentuated by the tremendous array of armament the nations concerned have accumulated under the guise of "national defense." Every additional ship adds to the danger of war. The great conciliating forces of internationalism—the real defense of civilized nations—have been strained as they have rarely been before. For all this, militarism and armament building have been mainly responsible. War is the business of armies and navies, and their aggregate influence the world over is for war.

Great Britain has made the historic claim to the "Overlordship of the Sea," with the power, if need be, to destroy the commerce of rivals, as she once destroyed that of Holland and deranged that of France. Germany has expressed her resolve not "to lie down before this perpetual menace." This rivalry has become in itself and in time of peace "a great European calamity." Perhaps but one greater is conceivable — that of open war.

The unthinkable cost of such a war has made it virtually impossible; no thanks, however, to army or navy. A better feeling appears lately in the councils of Europe. Apparently this is due to the fact that the Balkan troubles have shown somewhat of the depths of the abyss towards which militarism and exploitation were driving.

The true defense of any nation worth defending must lie in the intelligence, alertness and resources of its people. Along with this go the increasing power of internationalism, the ties of common thought and aspiration, and most immediately the innumerable bonds wov-

en by trade and by the common interests of business, small as well as great.

We should look upon our Navy as a contribution to the good order of the world. It is a natural part of a future International Police which shall guarantee the safety of life and property at sea the world over. It should be as ready to protect shipping against icebergs and derelicts as to ward off an enemy from the coast.

One of the first steps in this direction is to take away from the Navy its present right of piracy in time of war. For while private property on land is now immune, the merchant ships under an adversary's flag may still become a prize or perquisite of a man-of-war. There is no justification for this anomaly. The relief to commerce by the abrogation of the "Prize" system would take away much of the sting of international rivalries, and the commercial public would welcome the powerful help of the Navy League in achieving this. If we could also add the abatement of such protective tariffs as are intentionally obstructive, and of the use of force of arms to promote private spoliation in weak countries, there would not be much left for nations to wrangle over. But however desirable ultimately the absolute disarmament of nations as against each other, we cannot hope to reach it in a day nor in a generation. These matters proceed by slow progress, interrupted by reaction; we are in a period of relapse at present, when reactionary forces seem to be in the ascendant. But this very fact with its burdens and horrors may be counted on to turn the balance in the other direction.

Neither will there be a formal federation of nations in this era. Indeed federation in fact will come long before it comes in name. A single unified world-govern-

ment with centralized rule under one set of men at some one place, is only a dream — and not a cheerful dream at that. What the world needs is more self-control, not more governmental machinery.

Nevertheless every step in removing injustice, in eliminating sources of friction, in extending common interests, as the postal union, the telegraph union, international law, international police duties, international conferences and congresses, arbitration treaties and other agreements — are steps in the direction of the passing of war. To this end, three great contributing agencies are: the growth of the popular conscience, the interlocking of personal interests, and the ruinous expense which the progress of science has brought to every branch of military art. And by the same token each one of the six reasons of the naval circular headed as "national defense" is more or less fallacious. As already noted it is not true that "the Navy is our main defense," that the Navy has "21,000 miles of coast to defend," that "undefended resources invite aggression." All this implies a mediaeval relation among nations. And as to the second of these, do we infer that the need of defense is proportional to the length of the coast line? If so, our coast line is nearly forty times as long as that of Germany.

The United States isolated by its geography, by its democracy, by its freedom from entangling alliances, by its blood-kinship with all the European nations, by a commanding relation to European commerce, is apparently beyond all need of such protection. There is, in fact, something primitive, outworn and unprogressive in the spectacle of a civilized nation composed of millions of clever people trusting for its defense to forts and ships. With all the resources of business, of science, of

education, of thought, to depend on force seems a lazy, even cowardly, shrinking of the higher possibilities of national strength. To be surrounded by armed guards "holding the drop" on all commercial rivals is not a lofty conception of a nation's greatness. This attitude has been as disastrous to England's own peace of mind as it has been menacing to the world's welfare. For the American republic to follow needlessly an example like this would seem an ignominious surrender of democracy to mediaevalism.

The eleven "reasons" drawn from history are either fallacious or irrelevant. In no way do they relate to the "strong navy" which the Navy League advocates. In history, no nation ever had such a navy. It is to-day making its own precedents.

The navy did not "win the war of 1812." It was not "won" at all, by anybody.

As to the war with Spain, the less said the better. But surely we cannot say that "the Spanish war would never have taken place had Spain known our Navy's strength." The United States took the initiative in that war, and for motives of politics and business not connected with the military situation. This occurred after Spain, through our minister at Madrid, had agreed to grant every demand of the United States, including autonomy to Cuba and arbitration of all differences, including the loss of the Maine. In passing it may be remarked that much of the disorder in Cuba at that time was stimulated in New York.

The peace of Great Britain and that of Germany has not been assured by navies, and only in part and for a time by armies. At the time Germany was overrun by the French she was split up into a number of petty war-

ring states. In peaceful reunion and cooperation they have found strength. True, to a certain point the army of Germany for a while served as a protection from neighbors seeking revenge from humiliations arranged by Bismarck. But beyond this point, the overgrowth of army and navy has given an impuse toward war. This the firm hand of the Kaiser, with the caution of his bankers, has thus far held in check. The strength of Germany does not lie in her military domination, which is on the whole a burden, but in her system of education and in the industry of her people.

The weakness of China hitherto has lain in the absence of justice, of education, of science, of interest in public affairs on the part of her people. China could have no greater misfortune than to develop, in her present condition, a great army and navy with the accompanying war atmosphere.

The failure of Turkey lies mainly in the fact that she has little else than "war atmosphere." Her hold in Europe as in Asia is that of military despotism, and her financial excesses, mostly for army and navy, have plunged her hopelessly into debt.

Concerning the Monroe Doctrine, cited as a source of danger, if it be such, it should be reexamined and internationalized. Above all, it would seem that it might be merged into a joint Pan-American doctrine in which Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Canada and, it may be, Mexico and the lesser states should have part. It might well blend with the Drago Doctrine, most salutary, that national force of arms should not be used as an agency to uphold private interests in foreign lands. To invade a district because of a dispute over a more or less crooked franchise, does not promote international justice.

The United States has no vexatious "attitude towards possession or ownership of strategic alien harbors and coaling stations." The attempt to make an issue out of imaginary conditions at Magdalena Bay put the United States Senate in an absurd position. The resolution passed by the Senate was not signed by the President and it is therefore null and void.

"Battleships are cheaper than battles." They are likewise inciters of battles. Say also: "revolvers are cheaper than tombstones."

The cost of the Navy is not a "cheap insurance." Beyond a certain point it does not insure, and there is no evidence that the bulk of the property it insures could ever be in any danger whatever, even in time of war.

As to the cost of automobile tires, the amount is not relevant; for the owners of automobiles pay for the tires, not the nation at large. Those who cannot afford them soon cease to use them.

The cost of insect waste through the destruction of birds, is, as Admiral Wainwright has shown, more than the cost of the Navy. Yet when the nation asks for money to check such destruction, or for any similar purpose of conservation, sanitation or economy, the appropriations are most grudging — the Army and Navy must first take their share.

We are told recently: "If the Republican party had allowed the Navy to run down there would be European battleships headed for the Mexican ports at this time." Does anybody believe this? Does any one believe that the chief influence of the United States in international affairs is created by her warships? If this were true, it would certainly be most humiliating.

That "a reduced navy would impair national credit,"

or that "a navy insures against unsettled conditions of trade and commerce," are assertions merely. If they were true, they would be subject to limitations of reason. The credit of the United States is already higher than that of any of the Great Powers. The financiers of the world can read figures of debt and waste, and are not fooled by appearances.

Outside the sphere of war, the actual duties of the American Navy should mostly lie. In this field we freely admit it has had an honorable record; not the least of this has been the service of the good old steamer Albatross, which under the auspices of the Navy has contributed more than any other single agency to our knowledge of the deep sea and its inhabitants. At the same time we must admit that most of these duties of special service have been thrown on the smaller and cheaper ships, such as those of the present Revenue Cutter Service and the Coast and Geodetic Survey. It is not easy to imagine a dreadnaught serving any useful purpose in time of peace.

"The weight of a powerful navy gives force to diplomacy" — on the well known principle of the "brass-knuckle." "National efficiency" as shown by a great navy is no evidence that our side in a quarrel is just.

It may be true that treaties and agreements in the past have sometimes failed, especially where overridden by the military caste, and by the interests of exploitation. It may be that war is sometimes inevitable, though not often when effort is put forth to make it a last resort and not a first. No nation has yet refused to accept a decree of arbitration. The interests of justice demand that no contestant be at the same time judge of his own cause. Arbitration treaties serve to clinch and hold pub-

lic opinion, — and in the long run public opinion rules. War is only a man-made convention — a coarse, brutal and blundering way of settling disputes. It has changed its form and character all down through the ages, from the tribal raids to the "Strangling of Persia." It is now passing because the tax-payers can no longer afford it; and in its last struggles it shows itself as hard, selfish and venomous as it did in the days of Alva and Wallenstein.

"Negative righteousness means abstaining from evil, but positive righteousness may require a fight against evil." There is no evil greater than war, and the one honorable fight of our times is the struggle to relegate this to the place of last resort. As it recedes, the great navies of the world must recede with it.

The way to peace lies through peace. "Power and Strength" conjured up by debts never to be paid and maintained by intolerable taxation the world over, have no essential part in "the noble task of peace-maker."

There are two groups of motives behind the movement for naval extension, the one barely hinted at in the Naval circular, the other not at all; but both more potent than any of the "sixty-seven." The circular refers to the fact that naval extension gives work to thousands of men. It also gives large revenues on many millions of capital. In Europe, there are few exploiting firms more powerful than the great "Syndicates for war." In England, according to Mr. G. H. Perris, one man in every six is in some way financially interested in the business of war or war preparation. For the United States, we have no statistics; and our armour-plate industries are less in the public eye than those of the Krupps, Schneiders, and Armstrongs of Europe.

It is, however, an axiom in economics that public money paid for labor is money wasted unless the product be useful to the public service. That warships cost money and money is paid to capitalist and to laborer, is no argument for building them. Under normal conditions the same money and labor might run in useful channels. It might be used to restore our merchant marine, driven out of existence by our "protection" to shipbuilders. If warships are of public service, to build them is a productive industry. If they are not necessary, what is paid for them is lost as much as though it were directly sunk in the sea.

A second motive not indicated in the Naval Circular, is that of giant decoration. We may say that the richest nation in the world is entitled to the costliest and most showy accessories. The world-wide parade of our fleet seems to have had some such motive behind it. It has shown itself openly in the desire expressed by high authority to build the greatest navy in the world — just for greatness sake. It appears in the decision of Congress to make the latest battleships — the Pennsylvania, for example — bigger than any other ships of the kind in the world. One might argue in this fashion: "We are young and strong and progressive; we will beat old Europe at her own game, and that whether or not the game be worth the candle."

There is no touch of greed in this view of naval greatness, and in so far we may view it with respect, even though we may, with an eminent British statesman, regard it as "sheer vulgarity." But it cuts across our democratic traditions of economy and simplicity. It ill befits a practical people whose chief ambition is expressed in "Success."

To sum up:—Behind nominal reasons, we find the world over three motives or groups of motives for naval expansion. The desire "to safeguard peace" is not one of these — words only, when used in this connection. Actual motives are (1) caution or fear, (2) business demands, and (3) love of display. The first of these has been much exaggerated in the interest of the second. The second and third, both unavowed, are very real and very human, and both must be reckoned with in all public affairs.

There is also an element which favors extravagant appropriations as a means of obstructing tariff reduction. The United States stands almost alone among nations in having no responsible authority behind expenditures. It has as yet no formal budget, and its finances are at the mercy of shifting and log-rolling majorities. Our republic is perhaps the only great corporation which can spend money without consideration of its actual income.

The Navy of the United States stands near the parting of the ways. Shall it continue the honored servant of a democratic people, or shall it develop into a special caste, unchecked as to expense, uninterested in any matters save pomp and war?

Militarism, says John A. Hobson, survives in the world because it "is serviceable to the maintenance of the plutocracy. Its expenditure furnishes a profitable support to certain strong vested interests. It is a decorative element in social life, and above all, it is necessary to keep down the pressure of the forces of internal reform."

Thus far our naval personnel, as a whole, has been typical of our democratic citizenship. It has never appeared as a warrior caste claiming special privilege and authority, as has often been the case in Europe. In its

feelings and purposes it has not stood apart from the body of the people.

In a recent article on the "Psychology of War," Dr. Hugo Münsterberg declares that "inner wavering" as to righteousness of "relentless fight" should be "absolutely excluded from the officer's mind. He will not deny the harm and the losses war brings with it. But at the same time he will be deeply impressed by the tremendous moral power of a national self-defense which concentrates the energies of the whole nation in loyalty to its historical mission. He must grasp the fundamental role of war in the history of mankind as the great vehicle of progress, as the great eradicator of egotism, as the great educator to a spirit of sacrifice and duty." This represents an ideal alien to the spirit of democracy — and we trust that it may always be alien. And when, we may ask in passing, was war "an eradicator of egotism" in a conquering nation?

"Defense" at present certainly absorbs far too much of our national attention as well as of our national revenues. One cause of this lies in the initial mistake of making the control of the army and navy each co-ordinate departments of the national government. In normal relations of civilization "national defense" might constitute a bureau of the department of State, as national sanitation might constitute a division of the department of the Interior. Surely Education, Sanitation, Conservation, Reclamation, Administrative Economy are quite equal in importance to the need of physical defense against external foes.

Our great republic, above all other nations, should be rich in diplomatic resources, in proportion to its escape from the historical evils which led our ancestors to

leave the Europe of their day to form a nation of free men unhampered by caste, tradition or privilege.

Necessary expenditures in any line, we need not call into question. But it is well that the people should consider carefully what real necessities are. Whatever goes beyond this is waste. All waste calls for more waste — and waste everywhere breeds corruption. What, then, are our motives for steady and enormous increase in naval expenditure? The "sixty-seven reasons" furnish no satisfactory explanations, no valid arguments. The fear expressed by the Secretary of the Navy that France or even Japan may get ahead of us, has no pertinence whatever. To know the purposes of France or the resources of Japan, information perfectly accessible, fully answers the implied argument.

We should not go on building great floating fortresses simply because we have so begun, nor because England builds or Germany builds, or France builds or Austria, nor because we may fall to third place or tenth place in the rush if we do not build. There is no apparent rational motive in such action; and if valid causes lie behind it, it is fair that these should be made known.

Moreover, wars do not come by accident, nor without warning, nor are they dispensations of an uncontrollable Providence. A war is a form of world sickness. It affects for ill every function of civilization. It is brought on by human blundering, and it is quite as amenable to sanitation as any other form of human disorder.